

# BROADWAY'S FAVORITE CAD



## MARC KUDISCH: A CHARACTER ACTOR IN A LEADING MAN'S BODY

by Robert W Cabell

**I'm sitting across** from Marc Kudisch, Broadway's Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, Ruben in *Joseph*, and Conrad Birdie in the tour of *Bye, Bye, Birdie* opposite Tommy Tune,

now one of the stars of *High Society*. I'm looking at his chiseled matinee idol features — 6' 2" muscular frame, flashing eyes, gregarious grin — thinking, they couldn't have found a better choice to do the Cary Grant role. And he's got a great voice and comedic timing, too. So I ask:

**Marc, what is it like doing the Cary Grant role in *High Society*?**  
I'm not doing the Cary Grant role.

**You mean, you're doing the Jimmy Stewart role?**  
No.

**So who's left?**  
I'm playing George, the jilted fiancé.

**Oops, I guess I put my foot in it.**  
The thing is we are not doing either of the film adaptations; not *The Philadelphia Story* and not *High Society*, the 1954 film. We are taking some of the music from the movie, but it's being adapted from the original 1930's Philip Barry play *The Philadelphia Story*. And in the original play, George's role is much more vital. The show is centered around Tracy Lord's marriage to George at her Uncle Willie's estate in Oyster Bay. Sidney Kid, the editor of a trashy magazine called *Spy*, has threatened to do a slanderous story on Seth Lord and this certain dancer in New York City. To avoid a family scandal in such a sordid magazine, *Spy* agrees to kill the story if the Lord family allows their reporters to cover Tracy and George's wedding. Infuriated by the arrangement, Tracy decides to avenge her humiliation by painting a terribly decadent picture of the Lord family.

The show [*High Society*] opens with the servants introducing you to the house, the characters, and what you're going to see. The second act opens the same way. It's four o'clock in the morning and they're explaining what's been happening and how 'they' feel about it. The *Upstairs, Downstairs* rendition.

It's really a play with music, and it's wonderful music. *Riding High*, *Just One of Those Things*, *I Love Paris*, *She's Got That Thing*, *I Am Loved*, *Once Upon A Time*, *True Love*, *Let's Misbehave*, *It's Alright with Me*. Great songs. With Cole Porter's music, the more you look, the deeper you can go. The estate gave us a lot of range. Susan Birkenhead was allowed to write new lyrics, so a lot of songs have a whole different meaning. Randy Graff has this amazingly beautiful song called *He's the Right Guy*, which hasn't been heard forever.

**What's your favorite moment in the show?**  
When I sing *I Worship You*. It's a song which they cut from *Fifty Million French Men* [a long-forgotten Cole Porter musical] during rehearsals and never made it to Broadway.

**You're playing the fiancé and in real life you are one?**  
My fiancé is Kristin Chenoweth. She's blonde, 4'11", with blue eyes, and this funny little voice.

**She's 4'11" and you are 6'2"?**  
But she's a tall 4'11"! Kristen is one of the funniest people I know. Every minute of every day. Everybody says she is this brilliant comic actress. She is! She just did *Encore's Strike Up the Band*. She dances like a demon and I think she honestly has the finest voice on Broadway. We make a great couple because we both have very strong personalities and we both have a very strong sense of ourselves.

**For a man that has everything it takes to be the next great musical leading man, you've really focused on 'being funny'.**  
Like Gaston, George is the perfect role for me. To do comedy, you've got to have a good sense of who you are and be able to laugh at yourself. Comedy is dangerous and risky, but if you're not ready to walk out there and fall on your ass, there is no point of doing it. ■